

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION

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The defeat in the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Spanish Parliament of the motion taken by the Partido Popular which claimed that our waters are Spanish has taken place at the same time as our sovereignty over those same waters continues to be challenged locally.

The defeat of the PP motion by 5 votes was on the basis that the governing party in Spain considered that the PP was using Gibraltar as an excuse for undermining the Government. This was preceded by another verbal assault against Gibraltar by Cadiz MP Jose Ignacio Landaluze who based his arguments on the point that the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht did not cede the waters around Gibraltar but only those inside the Port. He accused Gibraltar of carrying out urban-based expansionism through land reclamation projects and has taken umbrage at the proposal put forward by the Opposition that Gibraltar should claim the 12 miles of territorial sea to which we are entitled.

The fact that the Partido Popular is so concerned at the possible extension of Gibraltar's territorial sea is because they know that under international law they can do nothing to stop it. Under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, Gibraltar presently claims three miles of sea where this is geographically possible, and the median line in the Bay. This has meant that there is a belt of sea on the east side which should be international waters until Gibraltar claims the twelve miles. Spain says that both Gibraltar waters and the belt of international sea are Spanish.

This has been reflected in the proposal made by the Spanish Government last year, which was accepted by the European Commission, for the designation in an environmental directive of both Gibraltar and international waters as of they were Spanish. It was further seen in the dispute over the wreck of the ship believed to be the treasure-laden HMS Sussex which lies between the three mile limit that we claim at present and the 12 miles of sea that we are entitled to claim.

In the meantime, there continue to be reports of Spanish helicopters and civil guard launches refusing to communicate with or take instructions from authorities in Gibraltar. The Opposition understands that air traffic control was trying to warn a Spanish helicopter in the area about an incoming civilian flight and that the Spanish helicopter would not answer the call. It was not until Gibraltar contacted Seville air traffic control that the helicopter responded to Seville's instructions to get in touch with Gibraltar. A similar incident took place at sea when a civil guard launch again refused to answer a call from the Royal Navy.

The fact that these incidents continue makes it clear that despite the rejection of the PP motion yesterday, the Spanish Government continues to challenge and to question the waters and airspace of Gibraltar and the authority that we exercise locally in the area. This is a very serious matter from a safety point of view given the level of air and maritime traffic in the vicinity of Gibraltar quite apart from the obvious political and sovereignty implications involved.

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